SOCIETY OF LA SALLE BROTHERS v. KETUA PENGARAH HASIL DALAM NEGERI

COURT OF APPEAL, PUTRAJAYA
TENGKU MAIMUN TUAN MAT JCA
ABDUL RAHMAN SEBLI JCA
ZALEHA YUSOF JCA
[CIVIL APPEAL NO: B-01(A)-83-03-2016]
18 APRIL 2017

CIVIL PROCEDURE: *Judicial review – Certiorari – Income tax – Application to quash notices of assessment – Charitable institution enjoyed exemption status under Income Tax Ordinance 1947 ('Ordinance') – Ordinance repealed and replaced by Income Tax Act 1967 ('Act') – Whether institution enjoyed tax exemption under Ordinance – Whether exemption impaired by repeal of Ordinance – Institution issued with notices for assessment – Whether notices valid*

REVENUE LAW: *Income tax – Exempt income – Charitable institution enjoyed exemption status under Income Tax Ordinance 1947 ('Ordinance') – Ordinance repealed and replaced by Income Tax Act 1967 ('Act') – Whether institution enjoyed tax exemption under Ordinance – Whether exemption impaired by repeal of Ordinance – Institution issued with notices for assessment – Whether institution no longer enjoyed exemption due to failure to apply for exemption status pursuant to amendments of law – Whether notices and penalties valid and rightly imposed*

In 1970, the respondent confirmed *via* a letter that the appellant, a charitable institution, enjoyed exemption status and was not liable to income tax ('the 1970 letter'). In 1995, the respondent informed the appellant of the requirement to re-apply the tax exemption status but the appellant failed to do so. In 2015, the appellant was served with notices of assessment with penalties for the years of assessment 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 ('the notices'). The assessment raised were more than RM40 million. The appellant filed for a judicial review at the High Court, seeking a *certiotari* order to quash the notices issued by the respondent. According to the appellant, it enjoyed tax exemption under the Income Tax Ordinance 1947 ('the Ordinance') and when the Ordinance was repealed and replaced by the Income Tax Act 1967 ('the Act'), the appellant's right remained unaffected. In opposing the judicial review, the respondent argued that, *inter alia*, the appellant (i) failed to file an appeal to the Special Commissioners of the Income Tax as provided under s. 99 of the Act and therefore, the application for judicial review was an abuse of court process; (ii) no longer enjoyed the exemption as it failed to apply for the exemption status pursuant to the amendments of the law and the penalties were rightly imposed on the appellant; and (iii) shouldered the burden of proving that the assessment was

A excessive or erroneous. The High Court Judge ('the HCJ') held that (i) the appellant was not an institution or organisation pursuant to s. 44(6) of the Act and therefore, the notices were issued in accordance with the Act; (ii) the burden of proof rested on the appellant to show that there was no existence of wilful fraud and default and negligence, which the appellant failed to B show; and (iii) the respondent was rightfully entitled to issue the notices and the imposition of the penalty in accordance with s. 112(3) of the Act. Hence the present appeal. The issues that arose for the court's adjudication were (i) whether the appellant enjoyed the tax exemption under the Ordinance; and (ii) whether the exemption enjoyed by the appellant impaired by the repeal C of the Ordinance.

Held (allowing appeal)
Per Tengku Maimun Tuan Mat JCA delivering the judgment of the court:

(1) The 1970 letter made reference to the appellant's 'last letter' and the respondent used the word 'confirmed', signifying that there would have D been other earlier letters from the appellant and there would have been an earlier decision granting the exemption. The respondent had not seriously denied that the appellant had enjoyed the tax exemption under the Ordinance. Therefore, the appellant's position that it had been granted tax exemption under the Ordinance was accepted. (paras 32 E & 35)

(2) While the Ordinance was repealed and replaced in whole by the Act, there is no express provisions in the Act which indicate that the vested rights acquired under the Ordinance shall be revoked. The HCJ failed to direct His Lordship's mind to s. 30 of the Interpretation Acts 1948 F and 1967 ('the IA'). Even though the tax exemption granted under the Act would have ceased automatically pursuant to the amendments of the Act, those amendments did not affect the appellant as it had not been granted the exemption under the Act but rather the Ordinance. The exemption remained valid and had not been revoked. Pursuant to G s. 30(1)(b) of the IA, the appellant continued to be entitled to the tax exemption. (paras 36, 43 & 45)

(3) The HCJ erred in his ruling on the burden of proof. While the standard of proof may have changed due to the Federal Court decision in *Sinnaiyah & Sons Sdn Bhd v. Damai Setia Sdn Bhd* (*'Sinnaiyah'*) which H held that at law there are only two standards of proof, namely beyond reasonable doubt for criminal cases and balance of probabilities for civil cases, *Sinnaiyah* did not alter the burden which, in this appeal, remained on the respondent to prove. (paras 50 & 51)

I

(4) The respondent had no basis in law to issue the notices and the decision to issue those notices were illegal and without jurisdiction. Therefore, the decision of the respondent was amenable to judicial review. (paras 47 & 52)

Bahasa Malaysia *Headnotes*

Pada 1970, responden mengesahkan melalui sepucuk surat kepada perayu bahawa institusi amalnya menikmati status pengecualian dan tidak dikenakan cukai pendapatan ('surat 1970'). Pada 1995, responden memaklumkan perayu akan keperluan memohon semula status pengecualian tetapi perayu gagal membuat permohonan ini. Pada 2015, perayu diserahkan notis-notis taksiran serta penalti bagi tahun taksiran 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 dan 2013 ('notis-notis'). Taksiran berjumlah lebih RM40 juta. Perayu memfailkan semakan kehakiman di Mahkamah Tinggi, memohon perintah *certiorari* membatalkan notis-notis yang dikeluarkan oleh responden. Menurut perayu, institusinya menikmati pengecualian cukai bawah Ordinan Cukai Pendapatan 1947 ('Ordinan') dan apabila Ordinan dimansuhkan dan diganti dengan Akta Cukai Pendapatan 1967 ('Akta'), haknya kekal tidak terjejas. Dalam membantah semakan kehakiman perayu, responden menghujahkan, antara lain, perayu (i) gagal memfailkan rayuan kepada Suruhanjaya Khas Cukai Pendapatan seperti yang diperuntukkan bawah s. 99 Akta dan dengan itu, permohonan semakan kehakiman satu salah guna proses mahkamah; (ii) tidak lagi menikmati pengecualian kerana gagal memohon status pengecualian berikutan pindaan undang-undang dan penalti wajar dikenakan terhadap perayu; dan (iii) memikul beban membuktikan taksiran tersebut melampau atau salah. Hakim Mahkamah Tinggi memutuskan (i) perayu bukan institusi atau organisasi yang dinyatakan dalam s. 44(6) Akta dan dengan itu, notis-notis yang dikeluarkan selaras dengan Akta; (ii) beban pembuktian bahawa tidak wujud penipuan dan keingkaran yang disengajakan dan kecuaian terletak pada perayu; dan (iii) responden berhak mengeluarkan notis-notis dan mengenakan penalti bawah s. 112(3) Akta. Maka timbul rayuan ini. Isu-isu yang berbangkit bagi pertimbangan mahkamah adalah (i) sama ada perayu menikmati pengecualian cukai bawah Ordinan; dan (ii) sama ada pengecualian yang dinikmati ini terjejas dengan pemansuhan Ordinan.

Diputuskan (membenarkan rayuan)
Oleh Tengku Maimun Tuan Mat HMR menyampaikan penghakiman mahkamah:

(1) Surat 1970 merujuk surat terakhir perayu dan responden menggunakan perkataan 'confirmed' dan ini menunjukkan terdapat surat-surat terdahulu daripada perayu dan mungkin wujud keputusan terdahulu yang membenarkan pengecualian. Responden tidak menafikan dengan serius bahawa perayu menikmati pengecualian cukai bawah Ordinan. Oleh itu, hujahan perayu bahawa institusinya dikecualikan daripada cukai bawah Ordinan diterima.

(2) Walaupun Ordinan dimansuhkan dan diganti sepenuhnya oleh Akta, tiada peruntukan dalam Akta yang jelas memperuntukkan hak-hak yang diperoleh bawah Ordinan terbatal. Hakim Mahkamah Tinggi gagal mengarahkan minda beliau pada s. 30 Akta Tafsiran 1948 dan 1967 ('AT'). Meskipun pengecualian cukai yang diberi bawah Akta akan secara automatik tamat susulan pindaan Akta, pindaan-pindaan tersebut tidak menjejaskan perayu kerana institusinya tidak diberi pengecualian bawah Akta tetapi bawah Ordinan. Pengecualian ini kekal sah dan tidak terbatal. Bawah s. 30(1)(b) AT, perayu masih berhak mendapat pengecualian cukai.

(3) Hakim Mahkamah Tinggi terkhilaf dalam keputusan beliau tentang beban pembuktian. Walaupun standard pembuktian berubah ekoran keputusan Mahkamah Persekutuan dalam *Sinnaiyah Sons Sdn Bhd v. Damai Setia Sdn Bhd* ('*Sinnaiyah*') yang memutuskan bahawa bawah undang-undang, hanya terdapat dua standard pembuktian iaitu melampaui keraguan munasabah bagi kes jenayah dan atas imbangan kebarangkalian bagi kes sivil, *Sinnaiyah* tidak mengubah beban yang, dalam kes ini, dipikul oleh responden untuk dibuktikan.

(4) Responden tiada asas undang-undang untuk mengeluarkan notis-notis tersebut dan keputusan mengeluarkan notis-notis tersebut tidak sah dan dibuat tanpa bidang kuasa. Maka keputusan responden tertakluk pada semakan kehakiman.

Case(s) referred to:

Government of Malaysia & Anor v. Jagdis Singh [1987] 1 CLJ 451; [1987] CLJ (Rep) 110 SC ***(refd)***

Keith Sellar v. Lee Kwang And Tennakoon V Lee Kwang [1980] 1 LNS 36 FC ***(refd)***

Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri v. Penang Realty Sdn Bhd & Another Appeal [2006] 2 CLJ 835 CA ***(refd)***

Kim Thye Co v. Ketua Pengarah Jabatan Hasil Dalam Negeri, Kuala Lumpur [1991] 3 CLJ 2507; [1991] 3 CLJ (Rep) 20 HC ***(refd)***

Metacorp Development v. Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri [2011] 1 LNS 1002 HC ***(refd)***

N.T.S. Arumugam Pillai v. Director- General of Inland Revenue [1977] 1 LNS 77 FC ***(refd)***

National Land Finance Co-Operative Society Ltd v. Director General of Inland Revenue [1993] 4 CLJ 339 SC ***(refd)***

Sinnaiyah & Sons Sdn Bhd v. Damai Setia Sdn Bhd [2015] 7 CLJ 584 FC ***(refd)***

Legislation referred to:

Finance (No. 2) Act 2000, ss. 26, 27

Finance Act 2007, s. 36

Income Tax Act 1967, ss. 44(6), 90(1), 99, 112(3), Schedule 6 para 13, Schedule 9 para 33

Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967, s. 30

For the appellant - DP Naban, S Saravana Kumar & Jason Tan; M/s Lee Hishammuddin Allen & Gledhill

For the respondent - Zaleha Adam, Duna Mohd Isa & Mohammad Fazli Lutffi Latiff; Inland Revenue Board

[Editor's note: Appeal from High Court, Shah Alam; Judicial Review No: 25-8-04-2015 (overruled).]

Reported by Najib Tamby

JUDGMENT

Tengku Maimun Tuan Mat JCA:

[1] This was an appeal by the Society of La Salle Brothers (the appellant) against the decision of the High Court in refusing the appellant's application for judicial review. The application was, among others for *certiorari*, to quash the notices of assessment dated 16 March 2015 for the years of assessment 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 (the years in dispute) issued by the Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri (the respondent).

[2] We heard the appeal and had unanimously allowed the same. Our reasons now follow.

The Background Facts

[3] The background facts as appeared in the affidavit in support of the appellant's judicial review application are as follows.

[4] The appellant, also known as the visitor in the Federation of the Malaya of the Christian's Brothers School, has been in Malaysia for more than 160 years and has been instrumental in establishing a number of La Salle schools in Malaysia. Thirty nine such schools are still in operation where the appellant continues to be involved with these schools alongside the Ministry of Education.

[5] The appellant's sole objective is to ensure that education is accessible to Malaysian of all races, religions and creed. The appellant has been and still is a charitable institution. It only holds investments in the form of fixed deposits, unit trust and securities. The returns from these investments generate sufficient income for the appellant to be self financing. This position has been consistent for the years in dispute, except for the year of assessment 2004 where the appellant had a higher return gain due to the disposal of its property in Penang.

[6] By a letter dated 26 January 1970, the respondent confirmed that the appellant enjoys tax exemption status. The said letter among others, states that the appellant is a charitable institution and is therefore not liable to income tax. The said letter was never withdrawn by the respondent.

[7] By virtue of the tax exemption, the appellant did not subject any of its investment returns to income tax, and the appellant has never paid any income tax on its returns.

[8] By a letter dated 25 July 1995 the respondent informed the appellant of the requirement to re-apply the tax exemption status. The appellant failed to do so.

[9] On 27 March 2015, the appellant was served with the notices of assessment dated 16 March 2015 with penalties for the years of assessment 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 (collectively referred to as "notices of assessment"). The assessment raised (including the penalties) were more than RM40 million.

The Income Tax Ordinance 1947/The Income Tax Act 1967

[10] Before the Income Tax Act 1967 (ITA 1967) came into effect, the Income Tax Ordinance 1947 (the 1947 Ordinance) was in force where s. 13(1)(g) provides:

> 13. (1) There shall be exempt from tax:
>
> (g) the income of any charitable institutions or of any body of persons or trust established for charitable purposes only:
>
> Provided that where a trade or business is carried on by any such institution, body of persons or trust, the income derived from such trade or business shall be exempt from tax only if such income is applied solely for charitable purposes and either:
>
> (i) the trade or business is exercised in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of such institution, body of persons or trust; or
>
> (ii) the work in connection with the trade or business is mainly carried on by persons for whose benefit such institution, body of persons or trust was established.

[11] When the whole of the 1947 Ordinance was repealed and replaced by the ITA 1967 with effect from 1 January 1968, the ITA similarly provide for tax exemption *vide* s. 127 of the ITA 1967 which reads:

> 127(1). Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act:
>
> (a) any income specified in Part 1 of Schedule 6; and
>
> (b) the income of any institution, person, authority or fund specified in Part II of that Schedule,
>
> shall, subject to this section, be exempt from tax.

[12] As at 26 January 1970, para. 13 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 read as follows:

> The income of any charitable institution, of the trust body of any trust or of any body of persons, if the institution, trust or body of persons in question is established for charitable purposes only:

Provided that, where a business is carried on by such institution, trust body or body of persons, the income from the business shall be exempt from tax only if it is applied solely for charitable purposes and either:

(a) the business is carried on in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of the institution, trust or body of persons; or

(b) the work in connection with the business is carried on by persons for whose benefit the institution, trust or body of persons was established.

[13] *Vide* the Finance Act 1986 the proviso to para. 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 was amended. The amendment which took effect from the year of assessment 1987 read as follows:

Provided that -

(a) where a business is carried on by any such institution, trust body or body of persons, the income from the business shall be exempt from tax only if it is applied solely for the charitable purposes and either:

(i) the business is carried on in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of the institution, trust or body of persons; or

(ii) the work in connection with the business is mainly carried on by persons for whose benefit the institution, trust or body of persons was established;

(b) the exemption under this paragraph shall not apply to income consisting of a dividend.

[14] Then again, by Finance Act 1988 which took effect from the year of assessment 1989, Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 was amended by substituting for para. 13 the following:

13. (1) Subject to this paragraph, the income, other than dividend income, of

(a) a charitable institution, trust body of any trust or body of persons, if the institution, trust body or body of persons in question is established in Malaysia for charitable purposes only and approved by the Director General for the purposes of this paragraph;

(b) a building fund approved under subsection 44(6) or a religious institution or organisation which is not operated or conducted primarily for profit and which is established in Malaysia exclusively for the purposes of religious worship or the advancement of religion.

(2) An institution, a trust body or body of persons referred to in subparagraph (1)(a):

(a) shall apply for approval from the Director General; and

A (b) shall apply its income, whether exempt or otherwise, solely for the charitable purposes or charitable objects within Malaysia and the amount so applied in a year of assessment shall not be less than seventy per cent (or such percentage as may be permitted by the Director General) of such income for the basis period for that year of assessment.

B (3) Where a business is carried on by an institution, a trust body, body of persons or an organisation referred to in subparagraph (1) the income from the business shall be exempt from tax if:

(a) the business is carried on in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of the institution, trust body, body of persons C or organization; or

(b) the work in connection with the business is mainly carried on by persons for whose benefit the institution, trust body, body of persons or organisation was established.

D **[15]** Paragraph 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 was again substituted *vide* s. 26 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2000 which took effect from the year of assessment 2001. The new para. 13 reads:

The income, other than dividend income, of:

(a) an institution or organisation approved for the purposes of E subsection 44(6) so long as the approval remains in force; or

(b) a religious institution or organisation which is not operated or conducted primarily for profit and which is established in Malaysia exclusively for the purposes of religious worship or the advancement of religion.

F **[16]** Further, s. 27 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2000 provides for a special provision relating to para. 13 of Schedule 6. It reads:

27. Notwithstanding any other provision of the principal Act, where a person is exempt by virtue of paragraph 13 of Schedule 6 before the coming into operation of the amendment to that paragraph in section 26 G of this Act, that exemption shall cease from the year of assessment 2003 for the basis period ending in that year:

Provided that such exemption shall continue, under paragraph 13 of Schedule 6 as amended in this Act, where an approval is granted to such person upon an application made under subsection 44(6) H of the principal Act.

[17] By s. 36 of the Finance Act 2007, para. 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA was again amended by deleting the words "other than dividend income.".

The Judicial Review Application

I **[18]** Based on the facts and the law set out above, the appellant applied and obtained leave to file judicial review, seeking to quash the respondent's decision in issuing the notices of assessment on the ground that the decision was *ultra vires*, illegal, void, unlawful and/or in excess of authority.

[19] Before the learned High Court Judge, the gist of the appellant's contention may be summarised as follows. The appellant was a charitable organisation and had enjoyed the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance. When the 1947 Ordinance was repealed and replaced by the ITA 1967 and various amendments were made thereto, the appellant's right which was acquired before the amendments remained unaffected. In other words, the amendments that were brought about by the Finance Act in 1986, 1988, 2000 and 2007 did not have retrospective effect so as to impair the vested rights of the appellant in relation to the tax exemption.

[20] In opposing the judicial review application, the respondent advanced the following arguments:

(i) that the application for judicial review was an abuse of process of the court as the appellant failed to file an appeal to the Special Commissioners of the Income Tax as provided under s. 99 of the ITA.

(ii) The tax exemption status cannot be deemed to be granted in perpetuity. The appellant no longer enjoy the exemption as it failed to apply for the exemption status pursuant to the amendments to the law.

(iii) Although the notices of assessment for years of assessment 2004, 2006 and 2007 were issued outside the limitation period, there was fraud and/or negligence on the part of the appellant with regards to the tax exemption.

(iv) The burden is on the appellant to prove that the assessment is excessive or erroneous; and

(v) The penalties were rightly imposed by the respondent on the appellant.

Findings Of The High Court

[21] The learned High Court Judge considered the law as it stood on 26 January 1970 and the position after the amendments to para. 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 which took place in 1986, 1988, 2000 and 2007 where His Lordship concluded that the words in the ITA 1967 and the Finance Act are clear and unambiguous.

[22] Whist acknowledging that the appellant is a charitable organisation and not liable to income tax as confirmed by the respondent's letter dated 26 January 1970, His Lordship held that following the amendments to the law, in particular *vide* the Finance Act (No. 2) 2000 read together with s. 44(6) of the ITA 1967, the exemption enjoyed by the appellant has ceased to have effect from 2013 (*sic*) unless the appellant obtained approval for the tax exemption from the Director General. Since the appellant had not obtained such approval, the appellant is not an institution or organisation pursuant to s. 44(6) of the ITA 1967. The notices of assessments for the years of assessment 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 were therefore issued in accordance with the ITA 1967.

[23] The learned High Court Judge further held that the argument by the appellant that the amendments cannot have retrospective effect does not apply on the facts of this case as the appellant had been notified to re-apply for the tax exemption.

[24] Citing *Government of Malaysia & Anor v. Jagdis Singh* [1987] 1 CLJ 451; [1987] CLJ (Rep) 110, His Lordship further found that the application of judicial review was inappropriate and an abuse of the process of the court as the appellant had bluntly refused and failed to resort to the appeal procedure provided for under s. 99 of the ITA 1967.

[25] On the issue of time bar, the learned judge ruled that the notices of assessment for the years 2004, 2006 and 2007 are beyond the period provided by s. 90(1) of the ITA 1967. His Lordship further ruled that the burden of proof rests on the appellant to show that there is no existence of wilful fraud, negligence and wilful default, which the appellant had failed to show. The learned judge thus concluded that the respondent was rightfully entitled to issue the notices of assessment for the years 2004, 2006 and 2007.

[26] The learned trial judge also found that the imposition of the penalty by the respondent at the rate of 20% was in accordance with s. 112(3) of the ITA 1967 in view of the appellant's failure to furnish their returns for the respective years by or before 30 April of the said assessment years.

[27] The appellant's application for judicial review on the basis that the respondent's decision was *ultra vires*, illegal, void, unlawful and/or in excess of authority was consequently dismissed, hence the appeal.

The Appeal

[28] Before us, learned counsel for the appellant raised the following issues:

(i) whether the learned High Court Judge erred in holding that the appellant has lost its right of exemption by merely considering the amending provisions made to the ITA 1967 without considering that the appellant did not obtain the right of exemption under the ITA 1967 but under the 1947 Ordinance;

(ii) whether the learned High Court Judge was correct on the burden of proof on fraud, negligence and wilful default as regards the notices of assessment issued out of time; and

(iii) whether the appellant was correct in filing the application for judicial review.

[29] Learned counsel for the respondent reiterated the position that the exemption granted to the appellant in 1970 has ceased to have effect through the amendments to the law and that the court has to give recognition to the amendments. Learned counsel repeated the arguments in the High Court in respect of the second and third issues raised by the appellant.

Our Findings

The Right Of Tax Exemption

[30] The learned High Court held that the appellant no longer enjoyed the exemption as the appellant had failed to re-apply for the exemption under the amended law. The first question for our determination was whether the appellant had enjoyed the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance or under the ITA 1967.

[31] This question was pertinent because the appellant contended that its right to the tax exemption accrued not under the ITA 1967 but under the 1947 Ordinance where in its affidavit in support for leave to apply for judicial review, the appellant highlighted the fact that the appellant has been in Malaysia for more than 160 years. The appellant further averred that in 1970, the respondent through its Pengawal Besar Hasil Dalam Negeri had confirmed that the appellant enjoyed the tax exemption status *vide* the respondent's letter dated 26 January 1970. The letter (see Rekod Rayuan Jld 2(2) Bhgn C: p. 265) reads:

> Tuan,
>
> Society of La Salle Brothers
>
> I refer to your last letter dated 20th November 1969.
>
> 2. The documents and information furnished have been examined and it is now confirmed:
>
> (a) that the Society of the La Salle Brothers in Malaysia is a charitable institution and is therefore not liable to income tax;
>
> (b) ...
>
> (c) ...
>
> 3. The following papers are returned herewith:
>
> (a) Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools 1925 Edition;
>
> (b) The Rule and the Constitutions, 1967-1968; and
>
> (c) Book of Government, 1967-1968.

[32] We noted that the respondent's letter dated 26 January 1970 made reference to the appellant's "last letter" and that the respondent used the word "confirmed", signifying that there would have been other earlier letters from the appellant and that there would have been an earlier decision granting the exemption, such that the respondent in the January 1970 letter only "confirmed" that the appellant was exempted from paying income tax.

[33] In the course of the hearing of the appeal, we had posed the question to learned counsel for the appellant as to the earlier letters and as to whether there was any document to show specifically the grant of exemption under the 1947 Ordinance, but counsel conceded that there was none.

[34] Be that as it may, having perused the records of appeal, we found that the respondent did not mount any challenge in respect of the appellant's averment that they had enjoyed the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance (see rekod rayuan tambahan: pp. 60-61, 66-77). In fact in the High Court, learned counsel for the respondent submitted as follows (rekod rayuan tambahan: p. 81):

> ... in view of the operation of the law, with the amendments under the Finance Act that has been gazetted, the Applicant's right has been automatically ceased ... They cannot bring up the issue that they have been a charitable institution that they have had an exemption for more than a hundred years, because base (sic) on the case laws itself, it does not excuse them and they were further notified in 1995 by the Respondent of the amendments to which they have totally ignored ... .

[35] Premised on the above, it was apparent that the respondent had not seriously denied that the appellant has been in Malaysia for more than a hundred years and that the appellant had enjoyed the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance, except that the respondent contended that under the law as amended, the appellant must re-apply to continue to enjoy the exemption. We therefore accepted the appellant's position that it had been granted the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance and that it follows that the exemption was granted not through the letter dated 26 January 1970 but much earlier than that.

[36] The next question was whether the exemption that was enjoyed by the appellant had been impaired by the repeal of the 1947 Ordinance. It would be pertinent to note that while the 1947 Ordinance was repealed and replaced in whole by the ITA 1967, there are no express provisions in the ITA 1967 which indicate that the vested rights acquired under the 1947 Ordinance shall be revoked.

[37] In this regard, learned counsel for the appellant highlighted s. 30 of the Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967 (the Interpretation Acts) which provides:

> Matters not affected by repeal
>
> 30. (1) The repeal of a written law in whole or in part shall not:
>
> (a) ...
>
> (b) affect any right, privilege, obligation or liability acquired, accrued or incurred under the repealed law;
>
> (c) ...
>
> (d) ...

[38] Learned counsel for the appellant submitted that the learned High Court Judge erred in not considering s. 30 of the Interpretation Acts and its applicability to the taxing statute.

[39] In considering whether the learned judge erred as contended by the appellant, we found guidance in the judgment of the Supreme Court in *National Land Finance Co-Operative Society Ltd v. Director General of Inland Revenue* [1993] 4 CLJ 339.

[40] In *National Land Finance Co-Operative Society Ltd (supra)*, the appellant, being a society registered under s. 7 of the Co-Operative Societies Ordinance 1948, was exempted from paying income tax under s. 13(1)(f)(ii) of the 1947 Ordinance. On repeal of the 1947 Ordinance, the exemption was continued by para. 33 of Schedule 9 of the ITA 1967. The respondent, contending that the amendment to the proviso to the said para. 33 by Act A471of 1980 had removed the exemption and made the amendment retrospective to the year of assessment 1968, raised assessments afresh on the appellant for the years of assessment 1977 to 1981.

[41] The Special Commissioners of the Income Tax discharged the assessments raised holding that the amendment to para. 33 of Schedule 9 of the ITA 1967 did not have the effect of removing the exemption from tax. On appeal by the respondent, the High Court held that the appellant no longer enjoyed the exemption by virtue of the said amendment and reversed the decision of the Special Commissioners.

The appellant appealed to the Supreme Court. In allowing the appeal, Gunn Chit Tuan CJ (Malaya) said at p. 344:

> In this case it is clear that the tax payer had an acquired right to exemption from tax under the Income Tax Ordinance 1947, when the Act came into force on 20 September 1967. That acquired right which was confirmed by the Special Commissioners of Income Tax in Case No. PKR 256 should only be overruled prospectively and not retrospectively. Admittedly the Legislature had made its intention clear in s. 1(5) of the Amendment Act A471 that s. 16 therein which amended Schedule 9 of the Act shall be deemed to have effect for the year of assessment 1968 and subsequent years of assessment. But the amendment Act A471 did not also expressly provide that Part I of the Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967 (Act 388) which includes the said s. 30 of the Act shall not apply. Therefore following the decision of Viscount Dilhorne, Lord Diplock and Lord Edmund-Davies in the House of Lords' case of *Floor v. Davis (Inspector of Taxes) supra*, the provisions of the Act must be construed having regard to the Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967. There is therefore a doubt, whether the Legislature had intended to impair the existing right of the tax payer and inflict a detriment to it as it takes away a vested right under the existing law to exemption from tax. As there is a doubt the ambiguity must be construed in favour of the tax payer as the said exemption from tax has not been removed by sufficiently clear words to achieve that purpose.

[42] In *Keith Sellar v. Lee Kwang And Tennakoon V Lee Kwang* [1980] 1 LNS 36; [1980] 2 MLJ 191, the Federal Court in dealing with paras. (b) and (d) of the Interpretation Acts stated that the right approach should be that unless it is so expressed in the new law, a vested right is not taken away.

[43] We agreed with learned counsel for the appellant that the learned High Court Judge, in rejecting the argument of learned counsel for the appellant that the amendments to the ITA 1967 did not affect the appellant's right, had failed to direct his mind to s. 30 of the Interpretation Acts. With respect, this failure was an error of law. We also noted that except for reiterating its position that tax exemption accorded to the appellant in 1970 had automatically ceased and that the appellant needed to re-apply which the appellant failed to do, we found that learned counsel for the respondent similarly had not addressed s. 30 of the Interpretation Acts.

[44] To our mind, the authorities, as set out above are clearly in support of the appellant's position. We agreed with learned counsel for the appellant that while the ITA 1967 repealed the whole of the Income Tax Ordinance 1947, there is nothing in the ITA 1967 which had expressly taken away the appellant's vested right under the 1947 Ordinance. Neither is there anything in the amending provisions which are inconsistent with the application of s. 30 of the Interpretation Acts.

[45] Hence, while the tax exemption granted under the ITA 1967 would have ceased automatically pursuant to the amendments to the ITA 1967, those amendments do not affect the appellant as it had not been granted the exemption under the ITA 1967 but rather under the 1947 Ordinance, which exemption remains valid and has not been revoked. Pursuant to s. 30(1)(b) of the Interpretation Acts, the appellant, in our judgment continues to be entitled to the tax exemption.

[46] At this juncture, it is perhaps pertinent to highlight that the amendments to para. 13 of the Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 have all been expressly stated to have prospective effect. Further, it is to be noted that while s. 27 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2000 specifically excludes taxpayers that were previously exempted under para. 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967, it did not exclude those exempted under s. 13(1)(g) of the 1947 Ordinance.

[47] In the premises, we found that the respondent had no basis in law to issue the said notices of assessment and that the decision to issue those notices were illegal and without jurisdiction.

[48] Given that the respondent acted without jurisdiction, the third issue has to be resolved in favour of the appellant. Notwithstanding that it has failed to resort to the appeal procedure under s. 99 of the ITA 1967, the

appellant cannot be precluded from applying for judicial review. This principle was set out in *Government of Malaysia & Anor v. Jagdis Singh (supra)* where Hashim Yeop Sani SCJ said at p. 115:

> A clear principle is reiterated here i.e. it is not a rigid rule that whenever there is an appeal procedure available to the applicant he should be denied judicial review. Judicial review is always at the discretion of the Court but where there are other avenue or remedy open to the applicant it will only be exercised in very exceptional circumstances.
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> *In Re Preston* was a tax case. It was quite clear from the speeches of their Lordships in the House of Lords that the Inland Revenue Commissioners were not immune from the process of judicial review. But what was also made clear is that remedy by way of judicial review is not to be available where an alternative remedy exists except in very exceptional cases.
>
> In answer to the first question we would therefore hold that the discretion is still with the Courts but where there is an appeal provision available to the applicant *certiorari* should not normally issue unless there is shown a clear lack of jurisdiction or a blatant failure to perform some statutory duty or in appropriate cases a serious breach of the principles of natural justice.

(See also *Metacorp Development v. Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri* [2011] 1 LNS 1002; [2011] 5 MLJ 447; *Kim Thye Co v. Ketua Pengarah Jabatan Hasil Dalam Negeri, Kuala Lumpur* [1991] 3 CLJ 2507; [1991] 3 CLJ (Rep) 20; *Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri v. Penang Realty Sdn Bhd & Another Appeal* [2006] 2 CLJ 835; [2006] 3 MLJ 597).

[49] In light of the above findings, the decision of the learned High Court Judge, with respect, could not be sustained.

[50] Although the second issue raised by learned counsel would be of no significance to the outcome of this appeal given our earlier findings, for completeness, we found that the learned High Court Judge erred in his ruling on the burden of proof. Suffice if we cite *N.T.S. Arumugam Pillai v. Director-General of Inland Revenue* [1977] 1 LNS 77; [1977] 2 MLJ 63. In *N.T.S. Arumugam Pillai (supra)*, the Special Commissioners of the Income Tax ruled that the Revenue was to prove fraud and wilful default beyond reasonable doubt and the burden on the appellant to rebut the case against him was on a balance of probabilities. The High Court found the decision of the Special Commissioners on the burden of proof "so eminently correct". The Federal Court found "no valid legal objections that can be sustained" in respect of the High Court's decision.

[51] While the standard of proof may have changed due to the decision of the Federal Court in *Sinnaiyah & Sons Sdn Bhd v. Damai Setia Sdn Bhd* [2015] 7 CLJ 584; [2015] 5 MLJ 1 which held that at law there are only two standards of proof, namely beyond reasonable doubt for criminal cases and balance of probabilities for civil cases, we opined that *Sinnaiyah (supra)* does not alter the burden, which in the instant appeal will remain on the respondent to prove fraud.

A

Conclusion

[52] To conclude, we found that the decision of the respondent in issuing the notices of assessment was illegal as it has failed to take into account the appellant's vested right under the 1947 Ordinance which has not been shown to have been impaired by the amendments effected to the ITA 1967. The failure of the appellant to re-apply for the tax exemption in our view was of no significance. The decision of the respondent was thus amenable to judicial review. The appeal was consequently allowed.

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